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### Love and the Supermarket of Desire

By T.S. McMillin  
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For too many people every year the promise turns into heartbreak. But you CAN hold on to the dream. Learn how inside . . .

Globe Mini Mag publications line the check-out aisle of the supermarket where I shop. With titles such as *How to Solve the Twelve Toughest Marriage Problems*, *Unexplained Mysteries of the World*, *Directory of Salt Free Foods*, *Chocolate Lovers Handbook*, *Guide to Cosmetic Surgery*, *Shopping Tips and Tricks*, and *How to Make Your Marriage Last Forever!* (whence comes our epigraph), such works are offered up to shoppers, along with cigarettes, razor blades, assorted candies, other magazines (*Time*, etc.), providing the culture they serve with the latest in ready-for-consumption knowledges. What else, we might wonder, is provided by this service? *How to Make Your Marriage Last Forever!* reminds us that "Yes, marriage is a serious business, but it's still tough to get a handle on exactly what kind of business it is. For example, what does it produce? Children? What is the intended market? Who are the 'stockholders'?" (5). Discussing marriage as a commercial proposition demonstrates at least two noteworthy traits of the culture that writes and reads this form of self-help literature: 1. marriage as an institution that has worked on behalf of the patriarchy to place women at the economic mercy of men (and that thus traditionally functions for phallogentrism); 2. the scope of capitalism, its dominance of culture and the discourses produced within that culture, discourses that commodify everything. *How to Make Your Marriage Last Forever!*, of course, does not critique these conditions, nor would we expect it to do so; that it is to be consumed in the supermarket places the publication squarely within the hegemonically controlled function of mass consumption as a piece of goods, a commodity equivalent in status to frozen peas, floor wax, vine-ripe tomatoes. Neither can we claim the supermarket as the unique site of mass consumption—book stores, theaters, radio stations, appliance stores participate as well in mass consumption, in a commodity culture's answer to everything: the Supermarket of Desire.

Everything is for sale in the Supermarket of Desire. All needs can be fulfilled, all hungers fed. Desires, needs, hungers—these are addressed, provided for, taken care of in such a way as to reify them differentially (from each individual consumer) and hypostatize them organically. A human being wants what it wants; capitalism and its commodity cultures supply what the human being demands. Objects of desire, then, are seen to originate from within the individual consumer; indeed, these desires become the proof that we **are** individuals, that each of us wants something different. These desires, however, rather than originating from within human beings, rather than being

the proof of the discreetness of selves, rather than being the proof of Self itself, are the **symptoms** of commodity culture, of the culture of capitalism. Mass production, along with producing goods, produces subjects to consume those goods. As Horkheimer and Adorno put it, "The attitude of the public, which ostensibly and actually favors the system of the culture industry, is a part of the system and not an excuse for it" (122). I want what I want in part because discourses produce a certain sort of "I" and my specific wants. Capitalism, in order to maintain order, has shifted its ideological emphasis from production (in its earliest stages) to consumption. The culture industry produces "goods" for consumption; to those goods are attached values, ideas, qualities, **desires**. "The result is the circle of manipulation and retroactive need in which the unity of the system grows stronger" (Horkheimer and Adorno, 121). In the Supermarket of Desire ("where America shops"), in the closed system of consumer capitalism, the act of shopping and the act of buying are the acts of becoming the proper subject, the subject who fits—thus both the act of consumption and the goods consumed define the self. The consumption of self-help literature—words that help the self eat right, live right, shop right, fix its car—works to define for members of consumer capitalism their desires and the means by which they can obtain the objects of desire; in so doing, it participates in the definition of culture itself, and the notions that circulate within that culture.

### Love for Sale

In the Supermarket of Desire, everything is parcelled, wrapped up snugly, its very look calling to the consumer, sometimes whispering "you want me," sometimes demanding to be bought. Goods themselves, through television's personal introductions, take on personalities; the personification of products and their recognizable appearances cause the moment of recognition—seeing the product on the shelf—to be a recognition of one's desire. One's desire, informed by advertising (and myriad other cultural apparatuses) is thus displaced and fragmented; objects **take on** the desires of consumers, take on the selves of consumers, tell consumers who they are and what they want. Buy this and you will be this: buy that and you will be that: buy and be: be through buying. The Supermarket of Desire does not hail one as a factory worker, a school teacher, a cab driver, an attorney. Buy a Lawn Boy and you are some one who owns a Lawn Boy; you are one who drinks Chivas Regal; you are **one who has**. The One Who Has (a.k.a. the One Who Wants—that the two are the same and yet different is part of the problem) wanders the aisles of the Supermarket of Desire, finding bits of its identity in the various objects that call to it; it has a self—this it is told—but its displaced and fragmented desires, its displaced and fragmented self, needs help, needs a cord, needs somehow to hang together. The self needs a Word, some words of advice, looks at books that serve, reads the covers of books that promise to help, finds titles that will tell how to be, finds Love.



### The Packaging of Love

The front cover of Leo Buscaglia's 1972 self-help manual is red. Large, capital letters at the top: LOVE. Medium-sized capitals at the bottom: LEO BUSCAGLIA. In the middle, a message: "A Warm/ And Wonderful Book/ About/ The Largest Experience/ In Life": between Love and Leo Buscaglia, the self finds warmth, red warmth promising wonder and large experiences. The quiet words in the middle on their warm cover speak to you, tell you softly that they want you; the book wants you: LOVE—you—LEO BUSCAGLIA—\$3.95.<sup>1</sup> Please, turn to the back cover—gently now—there. Axioms on love from inside, warm quotations that promise more love. An explanation: "This is a book about love. What it is and what it isn't. **It is about you**—and about everybody who has ever reached out to touch the heart of another" (emphasis added). [Followed by bar code and ISBN number.] This book, about love, you, and a bunch of other people, knows you (and it—and them), will bring you all together, will bring together the One Who Wants and the One Who Has—in love and over a bar code.

Open the back cover to A Note about the Author—that's it. Why, he's "a native Californian, is universally known and loved." Do you see? He has taught love: "Because of his awareness of life, he developed a 'love' course at USC" (emphasis added). "Through his teaching, lectures and writings, Leo Buscaglia is exerting a timely influence on us all as **he tells us what living is really all about**" (emphasis added). **You** need to know what living is all about. You've bought so many things today, and still you don't quite feel your self. Love is a beautiful thing. After all, isn't it the largest experience in life? **You** need the largest experience in life. **You** need love. **You** need this book. Buy this book.

### Love the Myth

To buy this book, to be in *Love*, is to find your self in a myth of love, a myth that signifies a truth that has been misplaced. Love, for Buscaglia, both lacks and avoids proper definition. Because "[l]ove has really been ignored by the scientists" (16), bad definitions circulate and confuse, speak a false love.

There is perhaps no word more misused than love. Francois Villon, the French Romantic poet, decried the fact that we constantly "beggar the poor love word to base usages and work-a-day desires." A person may "love" God and "love" apple pie or the Dodgers. He may see "love" as sacrifice or dependency. He may think of "love" only in a male-female relationship; as a referent to sexual "love"; or he may see it only in saintly purity. (88-9)

Even though "bad" definitions and "base usages" abound, "there are certain things which can be said about love, certain common elements which can be examined and which may help in clarifying the subject for discussion" (90). The true definition of love thus begins in a discourse of science. Love, a nebulous idea, is knowable, has a truth in the world of reason. Part of the myth of love is that love is a fact:

Love is a learned, emotional reaction. It is a response to a learned group of stimuli and behaviors. Like all learned behavior, it is effected by the interaction of the learner with his environment, the person's learning ability, and the type and strength of the reinforcers present; that is, which people respond, how they respond and to what degree they respond to his expressed love. (90-1)

Through this scientific discourse, *Love* establishes itself as a purveyor of truth—the truth of love. A love based in science is a reliable love, one that can be counted upon as true, real, rational. Hence the myth of love draws upon the myth of logocentrism to prove itself. From this ratiocinative basis, love becomes "one of the greatest miracles" (16), "a powerful life force" (88); although it is a "learned phenomenon" (15), "love is not a thing" (93). In short, love becomes Love, a magical force, a spirit; Love lives in a myth of a mysterious power.

Chapter III, "A Question of Definition," commences with an extended quotation from Corinthians.<sup>2</sup> At this point in the text, the discourse of science is overtaken by a biblical discourse, a deifying speech that places love not as an object but as a subject. Love emerges a mythic force, conquering all.

1. "Love cannot be captured or tied to a wall. Love only slips through the chains. If love wills to take another course, it goes; and all the prisons, guards, chains or obstructions in the world aren't strong enough to detain it for a second" (93). Love is a force for freedom, a proof of freedom, the defeat of incarceration. Love as truth establishes freedom as truth. Love is liberal, a liberation. Love is movement; it is the proof of the freedom to move: love "come[s] and go[es] as it wills, freely" (95): love proves the fact of free will.

2. "... [L]ove is illimitable, deep, infinite. ..." (129). Everywhere, limitless, growing, love is a totality, a presence ever gaining in strength: "Love, of some type and degree, is present in all civilized men" (95). Love is civilizing, homogenizing, **male**, a plenitude, full, and yet "[l]ove is never complete in any person. There is always room for growth" (95). Love is expansion, incorporation, colonization.

3. "Love is active, not passive" (99). Love works, produces; love is not made—it makes, "shares," "offers," "sets an appetizing, attractive gourmet table" (99). Love feeds. Christlike, it "offers itself as a continual feast to be nourished upon. ..." (99). Love is a supply god, a god of production, a god of



freedom, a gourmet god.

4. Love, "in all civilized men," is a (hu-)man. Love is "patient. "Love waits" (99). "Love listens. Love hears. Love touches, fondles" (180). "It sees as well as looks. . ." (187). Love is (just like us).

So says the mythifying discourse of Love. Barthes writes that myth has "a double function: it points out and it notifies, it makes us understand something and it imposes it upon us" (Barthes, 117). *Love*, in pointing out Love, both describes and inscribes a Love to live by, a **way of living**. Detailing the qualities of Love and connecting Love to a godly humanity, the mythification of Love imposes the truth of the discourses it marries as part of the mythifying process. *Love* goes everywhere: from Freud to Tibetan Buddhism to Timothy Leary to ego psychology to Christ and back to Freud to Sartre to Behaviorism, unifying everything, transforming history into nature,<sup>3</sup> imposing unity, wholeness, togetherness, reifying one big happy family of Man.<sup>4</sup> In the act of imposition, the violence of connection, history is erased and the naturalness of love written (in capital letters) over the traces. Hence, the concept of love is economized, homogenized, **cleaned up**.<sup>5</sup> A clean love more readily lends itself to productivity in the Supermarket of Desire (where the aisles are ever swept and mopped, the goods pulled to the front to present a full face, the fruits waxed and watered to appear fresh). *Love* explains the Supermarket of Desire, excuses it, packages differences for placement on shelves, delivers consumers to doors always open (and always closing automatically behind), delivers up *Love*-ing selves themselves packaged, individually-wrapped, ready for consumption.

The cleaning of Love also involves the cleaning of the self, the straightening and strengthening of the borders of each One: the myth of love insists on extreme individuality, on an antagonistic relation between self and society. As Barthes puts it, "Myth has an imperative, buttonholing character: . . . it is I whom it has come to seek" (124). Seeking "I," it finds me, alone, isolated, in opposition. Thus, "First of all the loving individual has to care about himself. This is number one" (Buscaglia, 18). In *Love*, one is utterly alone. "It is true that in the last analysis each man stands alone. No matter how many people surround him or how famous he may be, in the most significant moments of his life he'll most likely find himself alone" (75). This lone self,<sup>6</sup> responsible for and capable of caring for itself, finds itself (through finding itself) at odds with "culture": "The culture and society has the power, then, **if we choose to be a member of it**, to affect our thoughts, limit our choices, mold our behavior, teach us its definition of adjustment and show us what it means by love" (emphasis added, 63). The self exists **apart** from culture, entering and leaving as "he" pleases. The other is never the Other—in the Buscaglian economy, the subject is not a subject in the Symbolic, is not a subject at all, but is a self-identifying One, always in conflict with culture, always autonomously capable of changing its position in relation to culture and cultural constructions (or, more accurately for Buscaglia, cultural distortions of Naturally occurring phenomena). "And so, if

you don't like where you're at in terms of love, you can change it, you can create a new scene" (15-6). The self, separate from culture, must protect itself from culture's falsifications; the self is responsible to itself, capable of changing itself, charged by *Love* to love itself. The desires of the self, cleaned up and put in order, are thus reduced to a Desire for a clean, whole, orderly self,<sup>7</sup> whose narcissism is ever in conflict with civilization.<sup>8</sup>

Narcissism is necessary because all that is not the self (i.e., civilization, culture, society, the other) threatens the self with extinction, struggles to erase the "X factor,"<sup>9</sup> tries to take the naturally occurring self and remake it in its own image. The self must love itself, be true to itself, for if it doesn't, it may not be itself in the morning. Buscaglia is "simply suggesting that man must listen to his own 'drummer' or he will be marched right out of himself" (187).<sup>10</sup> Culture is the enemy, a structure of nameless strangers intent upon denying the truth of the individual, restricting the individual, ending individuality. The self, always opposed to the other, needs first to love itself, draw distinctly the lines around itself, before engaging the enemy. Insofar as culture has tampered with love, the self must revert to its own notion of love, the love of itself, and begin from there. After narcissistic self-protection, the self is capable of other love, whether society (the other) likes it or not. Unfortunately, culture's tinkering with love has left love dysfunctional (hence the need for repair or cleaning). How can one love the other when love isn't working because of the other? This is where Love takes over, "real" Love, the myth of *Love*. Problems with the self, problems in culture, problems with love—all can be solved by tapping into limitless, omnipresent, omnipotent Love. Love originates in narcissism, the Love of self—whence the import of loving one's neighbor as one loves one's self. In loving our selves we can model our love of others, recreate culture in our own images (i.e., based on emphatic individualism), make love by finding Love. Thus two things precede and are separate from culture: Love and the self. "In the end, you have only you" (27). You have you. Love is. These are the "facts" that inform the myth, make you buy the myth, buy yourself.

The work of *Love*, then, is manifold. It prescribes a way of living, a way that makes the individual—and then makes that individual responsible for its own life and difficulties. If your scene stinks, change your scene. *Love* charges the individual to scrutinize itself continually, to assume responsibility for everything, and to blame culture for the necessity to do so. *Love* says that learning Love (how to live) is unlearning cultural definitions of love. And yet learning Love is similar to learning other culturally marked endeavors:

If he desired to know about automobiles, he would, without question, study diligently about automobiles. If his wife desired to be a gourmet cook, she'd certainly study the art of cooking, perhaps even attend a cooking class. Yet, it never seems as obvious to him that if he wants to live in love, he must spend at least as much time as the auto mechanic or the gourmet in studying love [i.e., reading *Love*]. (56-7)



*Love* separates men and women, defines for them their proper functions in culture, even as it declaims against culture's work in doing this. Men work on cars, women cook. Female art instructors teach silly notions about drawing trees, boys really know trees, draw real trees, because they have climbed them.<sup>11</sup> *Love* makes life a company in which we all can invest, a stock we all can buy: "In fact, an investment in life is an investment in change. . . . We're all on a fantastic journey! Every day is new. Every experience is new. Every person is new. Everything is new, every morning of your life. Stop seeing it as a drag!" (42); *Love* democratizes life, makes us all fellow travellers: "The wealthy are just as susceptible to tears as are the poor" (167); makes everything possible, makes it possible to achieve anything, sanctifies work as the means to achieving everything: "Each person has the potential for love. But potential is never realized without work" (71). The first work is finding your self and developing the strength within. "To cope with what he finds and to still live in love, he must have strength. He'll only survive if this strength lies **within himself**" (emphasis added, 194). Survival is for the fittest, the one who fits.

*Love* makes the self utterly self-dependent, cut off from and in opposition to society. "He can depend upon no one or no thing for reinforcement and assurance but *himself*" (194). *Love* thus finds the self alone, in the fruit section of the Supermarket of Desire, a commodity; the self ("He") "can be the finest plum in the world, ripe, juicy, sweet, succulent and offer himself to all. But he must remember that there will be men who do not like plums" (197).<sup>12</sup> The commodified self must be its own possession: "In actuality, no man possesses anything but himself" (169); even though the self is the self's only possession ("in actuality"), the self must try to possess *Love*, for "One cannot give what he does not possess. To give love you must possess love" (57).<sup>13</sup> *Love* and the self are possessions to be owned, concepts cleaned up by *Love* and made the origins of truth, of what is real. Thus the desires and loves of the self (as consumer and consumable) are naturalized and opposed to cultural constructions of love, desire.<sup>14</sup>

*Love* "makes us understand" and "imposes on us" the unquestionable truth inherent in *Love* and in the self. If one is to be happy, one must learn and know these truths, must affirm these truths; one must be positive. Being positive entails another change of scene, a side-trip from the mythification of love; it involves a parallel mythification of another word, the creation of a "positive linguistic environment" (151). Uttering a single syllable can mean much, can initiate the affirmation of self and *Love*.

Perhaps the most positive word in the English language and that most conducive to continued growth in love is "Yes." "Yes" is the best "defroster" of frozen symbols and ideas. A lover says "Yes" to life, "Yes" to joy, "Yes" to knowledge, "Yes" to people, "Yes" to differences. He realizes that all things and people have something to offer him, that all things are in all things. (151)

This is not the Nietzschean affirmation of life, but rather a "yes" to those things that "have something to offer" the self, a "yes" to things that please.<sup>15</sup> *Love* teaches a "yes" that is a "no," a "yes" that forgets, that erases conditions, a "yes" that sutures over difference, suffering, oppression. Throwing a "yes" to the self or to *Love* ultimately means the affirmation of the status quo. In *Love*, things are "bad" because one does not say "yes" to itself or to *Love*; hence all problems will be solved by these affirmations that will subsequently effect an affirmation of (and reinstitution of) order.

In the final chapter, "Love Offers No Apology" (meaning love really is never having to say you're sorry?), Buscaglia ends on a positive note, leaving the reader with the solution to everything: the myth of *Love*. *Love* quits on a word and an ellipsis: "Yes . . . !" In between the word and the exclamation point—the self; on the other side of the quotation marks—*Love*; beyond these—the Supermarket of Desire; for saying yes to *Love* is saying yes to *Love*, an entire industry, an industry that cures the self, in both senses of the verb: restoring to health and preparing for keeping or use. After *Love* comes other works, books that use passages from *Love*, that maintain the mythification of *Love*.<sup>16</sup> Just as self-help books for "young businessmen" of the Gilded Age used the myth of success to institutionalize a self capable of fruitful participation in the economic climate of intensifying incorporation,<sup>17</sup> *Love* and its related works attempt to suit selves to consumer capitalism. Both myths (of love and of success) insist that everything is going to be all right: you must only be calm, be patient, be your self. Just say "yes."

### Love the Word

The myth of *Love* operates on the word. *Love* is taken up, made titular, de-historicized, "depoliticized,"<sup>18</sup> inserted into a metalanguage<sup>19</sup> that exempts *Love* from a textualization that would constitute the undoing of mythification. Textualizing love challenges its placement as myth—where it is clean, all-powerful, a unifying force—and perceives it in a text, a field of signifiers circulating in various discourses. As we have seen, Buscaglia, in his employment of a scientific discourse, addresses the textuality of love, looks at the work of words. Relying on the "psycholinguistics" of Timothy Leary and the language studies of Hayakawa and Wendell Johnson, Buscaglia posits language as a "stuck, frozen system" (28). A word is given an "intellectual and emotional meaning," and "you are stuck with that word the rest of your life" (27-8). Because love in particular has been given so many bad definitions, *Love* must confront the language of love, the power of language—must change the word.

Language in *Love*, like culture, is a restraining mechanism, something that incarcerates the individual. The primary function of language is to "transfer knowledge, attitudes, prejudices, feelings and those aspects which make personality and culture unique" (65). Language thus participates in the construc-



tion of the individual self's identity: it will "determine who he is, how he will see the world, how he will organize the world and how he will present his world to others" (66). The importance of language, then, the importance of words, necessitates taking control of words, wresting the control of words from the clutches of culture: "To be able to love one must control his linguistic environment. . ." (150-1). *Love* purports to enable the self to teach itself the right word, the true meaning of love. It is here that what can be seen as a rudimentary textualization of love becomes mythification, drawing on a myth of the self (and self-certainty) to clean up love, make Love. A product in the Supermarket of Desire, *Love* is a component in the production of unification, the covering over of differences, the bleaching of colors. Beginning as a word, as the title of a book, love is transformed into a thing,<sup>20</sup> a force, a myth.

Our work as it is unfolding here, insofar as it is a critique of the oppressive homogenization operative in the Supermarket of Desire, turns to a demythification of Love, a textualization of the word love. Following the methodology of Barthes (as mythologist), let us work backwards from the myth of love, a metalanguage, in order to see on what first-order semiological system it is based; for "myth is a peculiar system, in that it is constructed from a semiological chain which existed before it: it is a second-order semiological system" (Barthes, 114). That which is a sign in a first-order semiological system (i.e., in language) becomes a signifier in myth. In language, the sign has a meaning; in myth, the sign (now a signifier) is taken up by a form—it is emptied of meaning.<sup>21</sup> As a form, love signifies as we have seen above—it is a homogenizing, unifying, cleansing, democratizing, human-like force. But what meaning has been emptied in the process of mythification? On what meaning is the form predicated? What critical discourses would enable the textualization of love? At this point, we turn to psychoanalysis, where love has undergone over a century of scrutiny. Even as we make this turn, we begin to see a meaning designated for love: if, in its form, love is Love, this form has nourished itself on the meaning of love, on libido.

Freud devotes much attention to love, as a part of the psychical economy and as a linguistic element. In *Group Psychology* he writes that "[i]n its origin, function, and relation to sexual love, the 'Eros' of the philosopher Plato coincides exactly with the love-force, the libido of psycho-analysis. . ." (23). Freud points out that love as a myth of sorts is already in operation, creating problems for a psychoanalysis that attempts an archaeology of the psychical apparatus, a demythification of the soul and of human sexuality. Addressing the "majority of 'educated' people" who have found psychoanalysis' demystification insulting, Freud responds with a lesson in words:

Anyone who considers sex as something mortifying and humiliating to human nature is at liberty to make use of the more genteel expressions "Eros" and "erotic." I might have done so myself from the first and thus have spared myself much opposition. But I did not want to,

for I like to avoid concessions to faintheartedness. One can never tell where the road may lead one; one gives way first in words, and then little by little in substance too. I cannot see any merit in being ashamed of sex; the Greek word "Eros," which is to soften the affront, is in the end nothing more than a translation of our German word *Liebe* [love]; and finally, he who knows how to wait need make no concessions. (23)

In this passage, Freud undertakes a work similar to that of *Love*: the confrontation of cultural definitions of love; but where Buscaglia leaps into the construction of the form of Love, psychoanalysis returns to the interpretation of the meaning of love. The meaning of love and its various names are taken up at greater length in *Civilization and Its Discontents*, where we see that

People give the name "love" to the relation between a man and a woman whose genital needs have led them to found a family; but they also give the name "love" to the positive feelings between parents and children, and between the brothers and sisters of a family, although we are obliged to describe this as "aim-inhibited love" or "affection." Love with an inhibited aim was in fact originally fully sensual love, and it is so still in man's unconscious. Both—fully sensual love and aim-inhibited love—extend outside the family and create new bonds with people who before were strangers. Genital love leads to the formation of new families, and aim-inhibited love to "friendships" which become valuable from a cultural standpoint because they escape some of the limitations of genital love, as, for instance, its exclusiveness. But in the course of development the relation of love to civilization loses its unambiguity. On the one hand love comes into opposition to the interests of civilization; on the other, civilization threatens love with substantial restrictions. (49-50)

I cite these lengthy passages for several reasons. Their emphasis on love as a word contribute greatly to the textualization of love.<sup>22</sup> Love is removed from the sanctuary guarded by the priggish, those ashamed of sex, and returned to a textual field, a network of signifiers, wherein we can better understand the meaning of love. Freud permits us to more clearly see this meaning (i.e., libido) at the same time that he theorizes on the origins of mythification (which he locates in aim-inhibited love). As contributory as this analysis is to the textualization of love, however, it also marks the initial point of a slippage in the Freudian discourse on love.

What Freud delineates as aim-inhibited love becomes Eros, a force stemming from sensual love. In *Group Psychology*, Eros is defined as the lone "civilizing factor in the sense that it brings a change from egoism to altruism" (35). Hence, "a group is clearly held together by a power of some kind: and to what power could this feat be better ascribed than to Eros, which holds together



everything in the world" (24)? In drawing on Greek mythology here, Freud begins to take us afield (i.e., out of the field of textuality)—from contemporary cultural mythification to analysis and interpretation of meaning and then back to explanation of meaning in the discourse of mythology. As Freud himself warns above, when "one gives way first in words," substances follow; in the case of Eros, what begins as a word undergoes substantiation; what begins as sexual instincts becomes a mythic power:

... [T]he sexual instinct was transformed into Eros, which seeks to force together and hold together the portions of living substance. What are commonly called the sexual instincts are looked upon by us as the part of Eros which is directed toward objects. Our speculations have suggested that Eros operates from the beginning of life and appears as a "life instinct" in opposition to the "death instinct" which was brought into being by the coming to life of inorganic substance. (*Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, 54n-5)

Eros overtakes the sexual instincts from which it originates, gaining strength, unifying everything, **civilizing**. In *Civilization and Its Discontents*, Eros civilizes to the point of menacing, unifies to the point of threatening civilization. Aim-inhibited love, the "civilizing factor," is now in conflict with civilization: civilization restricts love, love undermines civilization. "This rift between them seems unavoidable" (50). The language of *Civilization and Its Discontents* characterizes Eros and Civilization as opponents locked in a struggle for power, a battle for rights to individuals. As characters, these "forces" achieve the status of the gods from which they have evolved; in this myth, as well as in the myth of *Love*, omnia vincit amor. "I may now add that civilization is a process in the service of Eros, whose purpose is to combine single human individuals, and after that families, then races, peoples and nations, into one great unity" (emphasis added, *CID*, 69).

While Freud has claimed earlier that Eros is a force for unity that is the result of a transformation in the sexual instinct, it is at the site of the "single human individual" that it is re-transformed into the sexual instinct, made flesh again, as it were, then separated again and pitted **against** the sexual instincts. And it is this scene that provides the explanation for Freud's mythification of Eros, the opposing of Eros to civilization, and the later return to sexuality: his own desire to **conserve** individuality. By way of the heavens, Freud returns to earth in order to stress the crisis of the individual. "Just as a planet revolves around a central body as well as rotating on its own axis, so the human individual takes part in the course of development of mankind at the same time as he pursues his own path in life" (*CID*, 88). The "human individual" is a world unto itself yet part of a system that threatens its autonomy, a threat that reveals itself **within** the self:

... the two urges, the one towards personal happiness and the other towards union with other human beings must struggle with each

other in every individual; and so, also, the two processes of individual and of cultural development must stand in hostile opposition to each other and mutually dispute the ground. But this struggle between the individual and society is not a derivative of the contradiction—probably an irreconcilable one—between the primal instincts of Eros and death. (88)

Civilization, in its service to Eros, engages in combat with sexual instinct, which itself is in service to Eros; adopting the guise of the super-ego, civilization enters the individual, brings the struggle home. As a conservation of individuality against the two-fold onslaught of a civilizing love, *Civilization and Its Discontents* is an admonition to save your self: "There is no golden rule<sup>23</sup> which applies to everyone: every man must find out for himself in what particular fashion he can be saved" (30). Freud proposes to save the individual by reifying its ontological status as an unique entity, a process that participates in the mythification of the self.<sup>24</sup> Thus, in expanding the nature and scope of Eros and mythifying the self (even as it is "analyzed"), Freud, while contributing greatly to the textualization of love, leaves us still in a "second-order semiological system." We are left with a self at risk: of being swallowed up into civilization, of being "consumed" by the object of love,<sup>25</sup> of being rendered "defenseless against suffering . . . when we love. . ." (*CID*, 29).

This does not negate the usefulness of psychoanalysis in textualizing love, but it does necessitate that we pick up that discourse elsewhere—in Lacan, which is never to begin, but to **enter**: no **one** initiates analysis, no **one** founds the possibility of love. To textualize love, we enter by way of the interpretation of rupture.<sup>26</sup> Kristeva locates love in the Lacanian economy of the symbolic, the imaginary, and the real:

The experience of love indissolubly ties together the *symbolic* (what is forbidden, distinguishable, thinkable), the *imaginary* (what the Self imagines in order to sustain and expand itself), and the *real* (that impossible domain where affects aspire to everything and where there is no one to take into account the fact that *I* am only a part). Strangled within this tight knot, reality vanishes: I do not take it into account, and I refer it, if I think of it, to one of the three other realms. That means that in love I never cease to be mistaken as to reality. (7)

Love itself textualizes: the symbolic, the imaginary, and the real are tied together in love. Thus love is a textuality, in which the subject is caught, by which the subject is deceived.

The deception is revealed in the subject's re-search for the real. Lacan: "But the subject is there to rediscover *where it was*—I anticipate—the real. I will justify what I have just said in a little while, but those who have been listening to me for some time know that I use, quite intentionally, the formula—*The gods*



belong to the field of the real" (FF, 45). Love is the return to the real, a return to the gods, a return that never occurs, an impossibility of a return the desire for which leads the subject on, deceives the subject as being a possible return. Love, for Lacan, and especially the love of transference, is a **model of deception**, the proto-text of deceit: "In persuading the other that he has that which may complement us, we assure ourselves of being able to continue to misunderstand precisely what we lack. The circle of deception, in so far as it highlights the dimension of love at the point named—this will serve us as an exemplary door to demonstrate the trick next time" (FF, 133). Demonstrating the trick as it occurs in vision, Lacan **sights** the loving I in its imagined relation to the Other: "As a specular mirage, love is essentially deception. It is situated in the field established at the level of the pleasure reference, of that sole signifier necessary to introduce a perspective centered on the Ideal point, capital I, placed somewhere in the Other, from which the Other sees me, in the form I like to be seen" (FF, 268). This relation is imagined precisely because of the demand of the subject that insists itself toward/into the real: "Demand constitutes the Other as already possessing the 'privilege' of satisfying needs, that is to say, the power of depriving them of that alone by which they are satisfied. This privilege of the Other thus outlines the radical form of the gift of that which the Other does not have, namely, its love" (*Écrits*, 286). The Other has no love, the subject is deceived by the demand for love (which is always a deception), love is impossible.

Have we textualized love in writing it impossible? Yes and no. In working away from the mythic proportions of Eros, we have returned to the libido (the meaning of love), to object-choice, to the question of one choosing an object with which to make one, the possibility of two becoming one. Textualizing love in the field in which one-that-is-not-one looks to the Other, that is, in the field of sexual relations, we have seen the text of a love that deceives. "In other words, what it is all about is the fact that love is impossible, and that the sexual relation founders in non-sense, not that this should in any way diminish the interest we feel for the Other" (*Feminine Sexuality*, 158). "True" love in the text of sexual relations? "Love rarely comes true, as each of us knows, and it only lasts for a time. For what is love other than banging one's head against a wall, since there is no sexual relation" (FS, 170)? Another impossibility: the phallic function precludes the possibility of sexual relations, denies the possibility of two-becoming-one.<sup>27</sup> Sexual relations are impossible; love, founded in demand, is impossible. We have clearly defined love as impossible—but is definition the sole means of textualization?

To love is to desire to be loved.<sup>28</sup> To love is to desire, **by definition**. Desire is definition.

You love mutton stew. You're not sure you desire it. Take the experience of the beautiful butcher's wife. She loves caviar, but she doesn't want any. That's why she desires it. You see, the object of desire is the cause of the desire,

and this object that is the cause of desire is the object of the drive—that is to say, the object around which the drive turns. (FF, 243)

If the object of desire is the cause of desire, then the existence of the object, its presence, founds the desire for it. In order for an object to be desired, it must exist as an object, must be removed from a text, particularized. "*Invidia* comes from *videre*" (FF, 115). Desiring an object thus means defining it, taking it from a (visual) field, speaking its existence. Desire is, in this sense, a discursive act, a discourse accomplished by removal—one desires with a discursive knife, carving its object from a textual field, defining it. Can we textualize love without defining it? What is love, anyway? or, at least, what is love like?

In her remarkable *Tales of Love*, Kristeva writes that "[t]he 'like' of metaphorical conveyance both assumes and upsets that constraint, and to the extent that it probabilizes the identity of signs, it questions the very probability of the reference. Being?—*Unbeing*" (273). Unbeing? What about **undefinition**? With Buscaglia, we have seen that **indefinition** leads to **redefinitions**, mythifications. Psychoanalysis, by defining love, has defined it as impossible. As Kristeva points out,

All love discourses have dealt with narcissism and have set themselves up as codes of positive, ideal values. Theologies and literatures, beyond sin and fiendish characters, invite us to carve out our own territory within love, establish ourselves as *particular*, outdo ourselves in a sublime Other—metaphor and metonymy of the sovereign Good. Because today we lack being *particular*, covered as we are with so much abjection, because the guideposts that insured our ascent toward the good have been proven questionable, we have crises of love. Let's admit it: lacks of love. (7)

Could this lack of love be somehow contingent on the very fact that we have desired love, (re-, in-)defined love, removed love from the text? Textualization—replacing love in a field of signifiers: if this means an undoing of definitions, a reversal of the vector of desire, the attempt to return an object to the text, are we falling into the trap of those "who think they can rescue the God of religion by replacing him by an impersonal, shadowy and abstract principle"?<sup>29</sup> Are we simply desiring a return to the real? Perhaps. It is most probable that love is impossible, that the goal of the attempt of a textualization of love is impossible. The possibility of love, however, may be in that attempt itself. In *Feminine Sexuality*, Lacan points out that the taking on of the cause of desire, the taking on of *objet a*, is the act of love (143). The choosing of an object, the removal of an object from the text (and the object's removal of the choosing subject from the text?)—"That is the act of love. To make love, as the term indicates, is poetry. Only there is a world between poetry and the act" (FS, 143). The attempt to write poetry, to make love, is the attempt of textualizing love. "So what was I writing you?—the only thing one can do with a measure of seriousness, a love letter"



(FS, 154). A letter, a text, writing, the attempt to write—where the One is lost, where the One is not found shopping in the Supermarket of Desire? Perhaps here, in writing, where we are not, the myth of Love unravels and the text of love becomes readable.

- <sup>1</sup> More recent editions read "\$4.95."
- <sup>2</sup> "Love is patient and kind; love is not jealous, or conceited, or proud; love is not happy with evil, but is happy with the truth. Love never gives up: its faith, hope and patience never fail. Love is eternal. . . There are faith, hope and love, these three; but the greatest of these is love" (86).
- <sup>3</sup> The phrase is from Barthes: "We reach here the very principle of myth: it transforms history into nature" (129).
- <sup>4</sup> A fine example of this: "Nature in Cambodia is very severe. Every year the monsoons come and wash everything into the rivers and streams and lakes. So you don't build great permanent mansions because nature has told you that it will only be washed away. You build little huts. Tourists look and say, 'Aren't they quaint but poor people! living in such squalor.' It's not squalor. It's how you perceive it. They love their houses which are comfortable and exactly right for their climate and culture. So I went to the lake. I found the people in the process of getting together and preparing for the monsoons. This meant that they were constructing big communal rafts. When the monsoons come and wash away their houses, several families get on a raft and live together about six months of the year. Wouldn't it be beautiful to live with your neighbors? Just think if we could make a raft together and live together for six months out of the year!" (Buscaglia, 25). The absence of any historical conditions and the omnipotent presence of a severe yet wise Nature enables the myth of Love to explain poverty tidily; the unifying discourse that is transcultural at the same time as it purports to recognize cultural differences allows for the recuperation of everything within capitalism and bourgeois Order.
- <sup>5</sup> Kristeva, in *Tales of Love*, tells us that "[a]ll the philosophies of thought . . . that have aimed to give the experience of love a strong hold on reality have pruned out of it what is disorderly in order to reduce it to an initiatory voyage drawn toward the supreme Good or the absolute Spirit" (8). This "strong hold on reality" calls up the "distorting" function of myth: "Myth hides nothing and flaunts nothing: it distorts; myth is neither a lie nor a confession: it is an inflexion" (Barthes, 129). Myth **cleans**.
- <sup>6</sup> For Buscaglia, the fact of the isolated, individual, entirely unique self is

marked out by the "X factor. Something within the *you of you* that is different from every single human being, that will determine how you will project in this world, how you will see this world, how you will become a special human being. That uniqueness is what worries me because it seems to me that we're dropping it; we're losing it" (20). Since the "X factor" comes from **within** each of us, each of us must truly be a unitary being, naturally disconnected from one another (and, hence, from society), capable of reconnection only through love (*Love*), which originates in love of one's self—thus the irony of all self-help books: the purported end of alienation through the reification of the alienated self.

- <sup>7</sup> To borrow a Lacanian term, a certain sort of self becomes every self's "object a." Or, as Buscaglia puts it, "My message to you today is simply that the best M & M in the world is a warm, pulsating, non-melting human being—YOU!" (15) The substitution of "M & M" for "a": further indication of what occurs in the Supermarket of Desire's commodification of everything.
- <sup>8</sup> Readers of Freud's *Civilization and Its Discontents* will by now be seeing some roots of *Love*. In the Freudian text, we find that "Normally, there is nothing of which we are more certain than the feeling of our self, of our own ego. This ego appears to us as something autonomous and unitary, marked off distinctly from everything else" (12-3). (Buscaglia apparently reads the verb "appears" as the verb "is," organicizing the truth of the ego.) Freud's emphasis on the need for "cleanliness and order" (39-40) informs the work of *Love*, which, as we have seen, is in part the cleaning up of the concept of Love and the employment of Love as a homogenizing, ordering force.
- <sup>9</sup> See note 5.
- <sup>10</sup> Thoreauvian notions echo throughout *Love*. Buscaglia gives *Walden* a good cleaning, ignoring the complexities of Thoreau's work, before "stretching the seams in putting on the coat."
- <sup>11</sup> "But here's Junior who really knows a tree as this little woman has never seen a tree in her life" (21). Teacher (culture, the other, woman) doesn't know the truth; Junior (the self, man) does. Similarly, Buscaglia writes, "Emily Post? She's sick! Why should we listen to somebody else tell us how to live our existence?" (36) Emily Post is culture, the other, woman. Buscaglia is the self, man, the truth; listen to **him** tell you how to live your existence.
- <sup>12</sup> This remarkable passage needs to be quoted at length. In finding selfhood in the Supermarket of Desire, Love turns to a format that emphasizes Buscaglia's suggestions as commandments, deifying the Supermarket and the commodified self:



He must learn that he cannot be loved by all men. That is the ideal. In the world of men, it is not found often. He can be the finest plum in the world, ripe, juicy, sweet, succulent and offer himself to all. But he must remember that there will be men who do not like plums.

He must understand that if he is the world's finest plum and someone he loves does not like plums, he has the choice of becoming a banana. But he must be warned that if he chooses to become a banana, he will be a second rate banana. But he can always be the best plum.

He must realize that if he chooses to be a second rate banana, he runs the risk of the loved one finding him second best and, wanting only the best, discarding him. He can then spend his life trying to become the best banana—which is impossible if he is a plum—or he can seek again to be the best plum. (197-8)

One is born a plum, and is thus responsible for being the best plum for sale in the Supermarket of Desire.

- 13 Note the mixing of the subjects of verb phrases here: One=he=you.
- 14 In *Love*, desire and love are parts of Love in a confused and often contradictory genealogy.
- 15 *Love's* injunction to say "yes" calls up the function of the word in other self-help texts. Dale Carnegie instructs the salesperson that he or she must get the customer saying "yes"; this will facilitate the sale. Getting the reader to say "yes" in *Love* is getting the reader to say "yes" to *Love*. Indeed, all self-help books insist on the need to say "yes" to the self, positing culturally articulated "no"s as the problem.
- 16 If you are interested in other Buscagliana, see *Living, Loving & Learning* (The Jubilant #1 Bestseller) (1982), or *Loving Each Other* ("The Magnificent #1 Bestseller") (1984).
- 17 See Alan Trachtenberg, *The Incorporation of America*; Richard Weiss, *The American Myth of Success*; while you're at it, check out my own "The Gilded Age and the Facts of Life" (unpublished).
- 18 See Barthes, 143.

- 19 See Barthes, 115.
- 20 This is a process to which Buscaglia alludes: "[Man] developed language to free himself, never imagining that he would become a slave to language. He found that the very same labels he originated to merely stand for something soon had the power to become the thing itself. Man began to act as if the word was the thing" (148). In *Love*, the author begins to act as if the word was the thing—this is an essential step in mythification.
- 21 "When it becomes form, the meaning leaves its contingency behind; it empties itself, it becomes impoverished, history evaporates, only the letter remains" (117).
- 22 I hear Lacan saying, "con-textualization." (See *Feminine Sexuality*, 143.)
- 23 The "golden rule" takes a beating in *Civilization and Its Discontents*, in which Freud asserts pragmatically that it just doesn't work (56-9). This section reaches its peak in the citation of a Heine joke—one that is "made funny" by the sight of "one's enemies" hanging from trees (57).
- 24 See Mikkel Borch-Jacobsen, "The Freudian Subject, From Politics to Ethics," in *October* 39 (MIT Press, 1989).
- 25 *Group Psychology*, 45.
- 26 "Is the *one* anterior to discontinuity? I do not think so, and everything that I have taught in recent years has tended to exclude this need for a closed *one*—a mirage to which is attached the reference to the enveloping psyche, a sort of double of the organism in which this false unity is thought to reside. You will grant me that the *one* that is introduced by the experience of the unconscious is the *one* of the split, of the stroke, of rupture" (*Four Fundamentals*, 26).
- 27 See *Feminine Sexuality*, 143.
- 28 See *Four Fundamentals*, 253: "To love is, essentially, to wish to be loved."
- 29 Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, 21.